SUPPORT FOR ETHNO-RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA[1]

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ABTRACT

This study focused on the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence in Indonesia. It employed a cross-cultural comparative research design involving Muslim and Christian respondents from different ethnic groups in two research areas. One of these areas, Ambon, experiences frequent eruptions of inter-group violence, while the other, Yogyakarta, is relatively peaceful; while disputes have occurred occasionally, they have not led to massive intergroup violence. This research used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches This study finds stronger identification with religion than with ethnicity. Muslims show greater ethno-religious identification than Christians. It also presents evidence for the proposition regarding religiocentrism in which a positive evaluation of the religious in-group is related to in-group identification and induces derogatory attitudes towards out-groups. The findings are also consistent with propositions concerning nationalistic attitudes which suggest that increased ethno-religious identification reduces nationalism.

Keyword: ethnicity, religion, ethno-religious identification, support for violence, perceived group threat, religiocentrism, nationalism

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menguji hubungan antara identifikasi etnik dan agama dan dukungan terhadap kekerasan antarkelompok di Indonesia. Penelitian dilakukan dengan menggunakan perbandingan lintas budaya yang melibatkan responden Muslim dan Kristen dari berbagai kelompok etnik di dua wilayah penelitian. Ambon, yang merupakan salah satu wilayah penelitian, sering mengalami letupan kekerasan antarkelompok, sedangkan di Yogyakarta kondisinya relatif tenang; walaupun permusuhan kadang-kadang terjadi, hal tersebut tidak meledak menjadi kekerasan antarkelompok yang masif. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan campuran antara kuantitatif dan kualitatif. Studi ini menunjukkan lebih kuatnya identifikasi agama dibandingkan etnisitas. Muslim memperlihatkan identifikasi agama dan etnik yang lebih kuat dibandingkan Kristen. Studi ini juga menyajikan bukti terkait teori religiosentrisme bahwa orang cenderung mengevaluasi secara positif kelompoknya sendiri dan cenderung merendahkan kelompok lain. Temuan studi ini juga konsisten dengan proposisi terkait sikap nasionalisme yang memperlihatkan bahwa meningkatnya identifikasi etnik dan agama mengurangi nasionalisme.

Kata kunci: *etnisitas, agama, identifikasi etnik dan agama, dukungan terhadap kekerasan, ancaman yang dipersepsikan kelompok, religiosentrisme, nasionalisme*

INTRODUCTION

Ethno-religious violence got a serious scholarly attention in Indonesia when the collective violence started to escalate widely in the country in 1990. An enormous amount of literature on ethno-religious conflicts has emerged as a result of research from a wide range of theoretical frameworks and the application of a variety of methods. Some have focused on its historical roots, while others have paid more attention to its impact. They have presented various arguments from different perspectives while looking at its

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context and escalation. Some have paid attention to the legacy of violence from the colonial era and the authoritarian state (Colombijn and Lindblad, 2002), the contestation of power in times of political transition (Bertrand, 2004), the competition of local contenders for resources (Van Klinken, 2006) and the global growth of terrorism networks (Sidel, 2006; ICG, 2011). Most studies have concentrated on historical factors, the dynamics of structural transformation and the elites who have competed for power as the elements that have led to the emergence of collective violence. Individual attitudes at grassroots level, such as those of villagers, religious communities or students who have supported the violence, have been factored in less, if not neglected, in their analyses.

This study adds new insights to this body of knowledge by focusing on the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence. It examines the relationship between ethno-religious identification and the ways in which people support different levels of violence perpetrated by their own group, such as protest, intimidating demonstrations, the destruction of property or the injuring or killing of people belonging to other ethno-religious groups. It conducts micro-level analyses of individuals' support for ethno-religious violence. Support for ethno-religious violence was viewed as a dimension of the exclusionary reactions that arise from rational intergroup competition and the dynamics of ethno-religious identification.

The substantial questions of the research included both descriptive and explanatory aspects. The descriptive questions asked about the presence of ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence among Muslims and Christians in Ambon and Yogyakarta; also about the ways in which ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence among Muslims and Christians is observable in the two cities. The explanatory questions addressed three issues. The first examined the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence. The second assessed the influence of social characteristics such as gender, parents' occupation or household income on this

relationship, and the third tested whether the relationships are affected by intermediate determinants such as perceived group threat, salience of identity, intergroup contact, memory of past violence, perceived discrimination, religiosity, nationalistic attitudes and distrust. The set of explanatory questions can be formulated as follows:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between ethno-religious identification among Christians and Muslims in Ambon and Yogyakarta and support for intergroup violence?

2. To what extent is there a relationship between ethno-religious identification among Christians and Muslims in Ambon and Yogyakarta and support for intergroup violence considering other individual-level determinants?

3. To what extent can we explain the relationship between ethno-religious identification among Christians and Muslims in Ambon and Yogyakarta and support for intergroup violence with particular intermediate determinants?

METHOD

This study employs a cross-cultural comparative research design involving Muslim and Christian respondents from different ethnic groups in two research areas. One of these areas, Ambon, experiences frequent eruptions of inter-group violence, while the other, Yogyakarta, is relatively peaceful. In Ambon, the social border between Muslims and Christians clearly defines their living space and their social activity. Both groups have established boundaries, and seldom interact across the demarcation of religious belonging. Their ethno-religious identification is so strong that tensions between Muslims and Christians have repeatedly led to intergroup violence. In contrast, the relationship between ethno-religious groups in Yogyakarta is relatively peaceful; while disputes have occurred occasionally, they have not led to massive intergroup violence.

This research uses a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches. It provides a large data set stemming from a survey that included respondents who were followed up with qualitative

interviews. The research sample was randomly drawn from the student population of six universities. At each research site, I chose one Christian university, one Muslim university and one state university. Overall, 1,500 respondents, equally distributed over these universities, became the research sample. The key informants for the interviews were selected from both respondents and non-respondents of the survey; for the respondents, the interviews were conducted after they had agreed to follow up their statements. They were asked to expand on their reasons and give additional explanations concerning the research topics.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The analyses of the large data set provided evidence for ethno-religious identification among Muslims and Christians in Ambon and Yogyakarta. Respondents came from a range of ethnic groups. A large number of Muslims were Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Ambonese or Butonese, while the Christians were predominantly Ambonese, Javanese, Bataknese or Chinese. Smaller ethnic groups were also represented in my sample, such as Minangkabau, Minahasa, Toraja, Timorese, Buginese, Makassarese and Papua.

All the ethno-religious groups considered ethnic identification to be an important element of their identities, but Muslims showed stronger ethnic identification than Christians. They spoke their ethnic language more frequently and attended ethnic ceremonies more often. More Muslims were also members of ethnic organizations. Regarding religious identification, Muslims participated in collective rituals more often than Christians. They also prayed and attended religious services more frequently. Only in terms of rites of passage was Muslim participation lower; those who did attend the ceremonies did so mainly for non-religious reasons, such as solidarity with neighbours, or to respect the invitation of their relatives. Muslims also had more religious in-group friends and less religious out-group friends.

My qualitative data supported the findings of the quantitative analyses. Ethnic identification among Muslims was stronger than among Christians. In Ambon, Muslims spoke their ethnic language more often than Christians; this was particularly the case in traditional ceremonies in Muslim villages. Christians used the Indonesian language more frequently than their ethnic tongue. The qualitative data also showed that religious identification was stronger than ethnic identification in both Ambon and Yogyakarta. The interviews revealed that personal religious expression and religious practices have become increasingly important over the last decade. Most of the interviewees confirmed that they participate in traditional ceremonies and religious rituals and gave religious reasons for doing so. Only in rites of passage did religious rituals blend with ethnic rituals; more specifically, in marriage and funerary rituals. Here participation also stemmed from non-religious reasons. Compared to Christians, Muslims were more involved in religious organizations or religiously affiliated political organizations. A few of the Christians also claimed to engage in religious organizations, but these organizations have political interests. Both quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that religious identification was stronger and more important than ethnic identification, and that overall, Muslims showed stronger religious identification than Christians.

The second research question, on support for intergroup violence, was also answered via both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The measurement of support for violence underwent rigorous factor analyses. I found that such support has two dimensions: support for public criticism and demonstrations, and support for harm to persons and property. In general, respondents tended to support public criticism and demonstrations, but rejected support for harm to persons and property. When the comparison between Muslims and Christians was made, Muslims were more supportive of demonstrations and relatively less supportive of harm to persons and property than Christians. My interviews elaborated the findings of the quantitative analyses: that Muslims supported harm less, but supported demonstrations more than Christians. In Ambon, all informants, Muslims as well as Christians expressed support for harm, especially those who had strong memories and past experiences of violence. Most

of them also agreed with supporting harm to persons and property as an act of self-defence. The data triangulation affirms that both Muslims and Christians supported public criticism and demonstrations more than harm to persons and property.

The first explanatory question, on the relationship between self-definition of ethno-religious groups and support for harm, showed that most ethno-religious groups, the exceptions being Sundanese Muslims and Javanese Christians, were more likely to support harm than Javanese Muslims. Most support was given by the Madurese Muslims and the Ambonese Christians. On support for demonstrations, Muslim ethno-religious groups were more supportive, while the Christian ethno-religious groups were less supportive than the Javanese Muslims.

The second explanatory question was answered by testing the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence. I found that respondents' support for harm was influenced by their number of friends of the same religion. Those who have many friends of the same religion showed less support for harm. On support for demonstrations, I found that participation in collective rituals and the membership of religious organization were strong determinants. The more active people participated in collective rituals, the more they supported demonstrations. In addition, those who are members of religious organizations also showed more support for demonstrations than non-members.

Individual determinants, such as education and profession of parents, or gender of respondents, did not significantly affect the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for violence; the results were similar for support for harm and support for demonstrations. Respondents whose parents are farmers showed more support than respondents whose parents work as managers, clerks, traders, machine operators or manual labourers. Respondents from relatively higher income levels showed more support than those with lower income levels. In general, the findings demonstrated that support for violence could only partially be explained by individual

socio-economic status; ethno-religious identification persisted as a strong determinant after taking these individual characteristics into account.

The third research question was answered by testing the influence of intermediary variables on the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for violence. These variables were derived from diverse theoretical insights, and comprised perceived group threat, salience of identity, intergroup contact, memory of violence, perceived discrimination, religiosity (including attitudes towards religious plurality, religiocentrism and fundamentalism), nationalistic attitudes and distrust. Concerning support for harm, I found that perceived group threat, religiocentrism (i.e. positive in-group attitudes), pluralism and nationalistic attitudes influenced the relationship. The more that people perceived group threat and the more they had positive in-group attitudes, the more likely they were to support harm to persons and property, which supported my hypotheses in this respect. Contrary to my expectations, people with a pluralistic religious view showed more support for harm. Support for harm was also stronger when nationalism was relatively low. Concerning support for demonstrations, the relevant intermediate determinants were salience of ethnic identity and acceptance of hermeneutic interpretations: the more the respondents accepted the salience of ethnic identity and the more they agreed that Holy Scriptures need hermeneutic interpretation (contrary to fundamentalism), the more they supported demonstrations.

This study makes an innovative contribution to the theoretical and methodological development of research on ethno-religious conflict in Indonesia. I will discuss this contribution in terms of the research questions, the measurements and the data analysis.

First, I set out to answer descriptive questions about ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence, and explanatory questions on the relationship between these variables with individual characteristics as well as intermediate determinants. These questions have not been explored in previous studies on conflict in Indonesia; most have paid more attention to the wider context of economic and

political developments, e.g. the three influential studies of Bertrand (2004), Sidel (2006) and Van Klinken (2007a). While their studies certainly contribute to the overall understanding of the causes and effects of violence in Indonesia, they do not provide adequate explanations as to why individual people support violence; neither do they test theories about intergroup violence in relation to other theories. This study seeks to complement previous studies by explaining the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence. I tested hypotheses regarding the influence of individual determinants and different measures for religious identification, support for intergroup violence as well as intermediary variables.

This study is not alone in seeking to explain support for violence in Indonesia via the analysis of individuals, but it is the only one to use mixed methods: quantitative methods with a large number of respondents, and qualitative methods with semi-structured interviews with a selection of these respondents. One of the previous investigations of the individual angle was conducted by Adam (2010) who examined how ordinary people became involved in the Ambon conflict. Via case studies carried out in the villages of Hila, Kaitetu and Waai, he described the involvement of people in the conflict as the result of long-standing competition along religious lines over land and jobs. The competition between Ambonese and immigrants, and between Muslims and Christians made up the context in which violence erupted. His findings, however, are limited to the areas in which he made his observations. Being based in specific contexts, his study lacks standardised measurements for intergroup comparisons. Unlike previous studies, my work integrates qualitative or quantitative approaches in the research design, methods and analyses. The quantitative approach provides general findings, which are elaborated in more detail with the help of interviews. I did not find contradictory results between quantitative and qualitative data. Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data gives the findings greater validity and reliability.

Second, I developed measurements that were guided by theories related to Western countries.

As mentioned earlier, these were primarily social identity theory, realistic conflict theory and ethnic group conflict theory; I made additional use of theories related to salience of identity, intergroup contact, memory of violence, perceived discrimination, attitudes towards plurality, religiocentrism, fundamentalism, nationalistic attitudes and distrust. On this basis, I made inventories of measurements that have been repeatedly tested in Western (and in some cases also Asian) countries. Reliability as indicated by Cronbach's alpha is the main consideration for the inclusion of specific measurements. I then assessed the standardised measurements and adjusted them for their application to my Indonesian research context. Some measurements that I could not find in previous studies were explored through meticulous discussions of the variables. For instance, the measure for ethno-religious identification was adapted from the ethnic identification measure from Phinney (1992) and Phinney and Ong (2007). I added religious identification to the measure by taking into account the ritualistic dimension of religion (Allport and Ross, 1967; Scheepers et al., 2002b).

I also made improvements to my measurement of support for violence. Since I could not find appropriate measurements from Western societies, I used the measurement of Hadiwitanto et al. (2007) as a starting point. His questionnaire is relevant as he investigated religion, social trust and conflict in Ambon, but his measurement of support for violence was inadequately developed since the levels of violence he distinguished were unequally distributed over different societal domains (political, economic, socio-cultural and religious). This imbalance would affect the results, possibly eliminating important factors before data gathering. I therefore modified the measurements so that they were distributed evenly over the economic, political, cultural and religious domains. Each domain was then assessed in terms of four dimensions of support for violence: support for public debates, for demonstrations, for corporal and for material harm.

I found two dimensions: a high level of support, i.e., support for harm to persons and property, and a low level of support, i.e., support for public criticism and demonstrations. For independent

variables, factor analyses were run for religious practices and religious ceremonies. Muslims and Christians were given similar measurement items, even though the two religious groups differ in their ceremonies. For Muslims, the ceremonies included circumcision, weddings, funerals, fasting, *Idul Fitri* and *Idul Adha*. For Christians, the questions about ceremonies included baptism, weddings, Christmas, Easter, funerals and fasting. The result was three dimensions to use as comparable model solutions for both Muslims and Christians: collective rituals, rites of passage and religious practices. For intermediary determinants, I found that perceived group threat was concentrated in two dimensions: politics and economy on the one hand and socio-cultural factors on the other. Salience of identity also had two dimensions: ethnicity and religion. Intergroup contact was measured by quantity and quality of contact. Quantity was clearly constructed in a single dimension. I also decided to use a single dimension for quality of contact, since the factor analysis determined two dimensions with a high correlation: closeness and cooperation, evaluation and equality. Other intermediary determinants such as perceived discrimination, religiocentrism, attitudes towards religious plurality, religious fundamentalism and nationalistic attitudes had two dimensions respectively.

To analyze the differences between Muslims and Christians, and the variation between ethno-religious groups, I compared their means and made t-tests. An analysis of variance was also made by testing all dimensions to reveal their correlation and tendencies. For this, I took into account of the statistic of F, the significance level, and the correlation among the tested variables. The analysis of variance specifically looked into the (linear versus non-linear) nature of the relationships between the dependent variable(s) and independent variables as well as relationships with control and intermediary variables.

Finally, I conducted multivariate regression analyses. This study demonstrates the relevance of certain theories in Indonesia. I provided evidence that ethnic competition theory can explain the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for intergroup violence in Indonesia.

The level of ethno-religious identification actually overwhelmed the individual determinants, which has not been shown in Western countries. I found evidence that the perception of out-group threat, positive attitudes towards religious in-groups and nationalistic attitudes intermediate the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for violence. Hence, the stronger the ethno-religious identification, the stronger the perceptions of out-group threat that induce support for harm. The stronger the level of ethno-religious identification, the higher the positive in-group attitudes that induce support for harm. Another interesting result was the negative influence of nationalism on support for violence, consistent with previous studies in Western contexts (Coenders, 2001; Todosijevic, 2001; Coenders et al., 2004). This study shows that declining nationalism increases support for harm. This is true in Indonesia; nationalism continues to decrease due to the struggle for local autonomy. Local conflicts such as those in Ambon are largely to do with the pursuit of greater local autonomy, as opposed to national interests. The devolution of power as a result of local autonomy has opened up competition over economic resources, and elite contestation of political power for their own interests. In order to maintain their power while adjusting to decentralization, the elites have often mobilized their followers through ethnic ties or religious networks to attain their objectives (Aspinal and Fealy, 2003: 6–9; Van Klinken, 2006: 138–143).

However, the study revises a previous theory on pluralism. In earlier studies, pluralism is described as the individual's positive appreciation of religious plurality, either in the acceptance of underlying common elements of different religious traditions, or by stressing the value and richness of differences between religious traditions (Anthony et al., 2005; 2015). Therefore, pluralism is expected to have a negative association with support for harm. My result pointed towards a positive relation, i.e., the more that individuals agreed with pluralism, the more they supported harm. This implied support for harm among respondents with an explicit personal (religious) interpretation of religious plurality. This support had no connection with the positive

attitudes towards religious plurality. It could arise from other factors–i.e. that respondents have their own, personal agenda in relation to support for violence. The support of violence had nothing to do with their pluralistic view.

In the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for demonstrations, salience of ethnic identity and hermeneutic interpretation were intermediate determinants. Ethnic salience is the awareness of individuals of their ethnic categorization and identity and the importance of this ethnic identification to them (Phinney, 1990; Duckit, 2006: 154). As I predicted, this study provided evidence that ethnic salience mediated the relationship between ethno-religious identification and support for demonstrations. It highlighted the on going importance of ethnicity in Indonesia. In addition, more agreement with hermeneutic interpretations of sacred texts induced more support for demonstrations, relatively. It means that support for demonstrations was also given by people who have a critical, but committed, attitude towards their own religious texts.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings have supported the main theories and add explanations for other theories that I have examined in this study. The study have provided evidence for social identity theory, which holds that individuals always attempt to construct a positive social identity for their in-groups, and to disassociate themselves from out-groups (Tajfel, 1978; 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Phinney and Ong, 2007). I have found stronger identification with religion than with ethnicity. When I compared the groups, Muslims showed greater ethno-religious identification than Christians. These findings have provided confirmation of previous studies in Indonesia that show the growth of religious identification, especially among Muslims since the 1990s (van Bruinessen, 2004; Sidel, 2006; Hefner, 2011).

The findings on perceived group threat have validated ethnic group conflict theory, in which perceived threat is the strongest determinant for prejudicial and exclusionary attitudes towards out-groups (Scheepers et al., 2002a; Gijsbert et

al., 2004; Coenders et al., 2007; Savelkoul et al., 2010). It suggests that this theory, which is able to explain exclusionary phenomena in Western countries, is also applicable to Indonesian society. Nonetheless, this study has not tested the contextual level that is part of the theory and which includes the influence of actual competition, migration and relative group size (majority and minority status).

I have also presented evidence for the proposition regarding religiocentrism by Sterkens and Anthony (2008), in which a positive evaluation of the religious in-group is related to in-group identification and induces derogatory attitudes towards out-groups. However, in relation to religious attitudes towards plurality, my findings have contradicted earlier studies. While these studies have shown that pluralism reduces prejudice and hostility towards out-groups (Anthony et al., 2005; cf. Anthony et al. 2015), my study has found evidence that people who have a pluralistic religious view do support violence. Seemingly, pluralism can be as much an indicator for religious identification as monism.

These findings have been consistent with propositions concerning nationalistic attitudes (Coenders, 2001; Todosijevic, 2001), which suggest that increased ethno-religious identification reduces nationalism (i.e. commitment to the national Indonesian state, and therefore opposition to appeals for regional autonomy). Lower levels of nationalism in turn lead to greater support for violence, which in my research contexts is mostly related to the struggle for emancipation by specific ethno-religious groups. The findings therefore have supported the theoretical proposition that the degradation of nationalism contributes to the outbreak of ethno-religious violence (Bertrand, 2004).

At the lower level of support for intergroup violence, i.e. support for protests and demonstrations, I have found ethnic salience and hermeneutic interpretation to be relevant intermediate determinant variables. My study has validated earlier studies that show a significance correlation between ethno-religious identification and ethnic salience: the greater the salience of ethnic identity, the higher the likelihood of support for

violence. Moreover, the acceptance of hermeneutic interpretations at the root of religiosity also increases support for violence. This finding has contradicted an earlier study, which suggests that only fundamentalist interpretations of religious texts induce support for violence (Williamson et al., 2010).

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